2021 • EAGLE COUNTY, CO

Aging Well Plan

EAGLE COUNTY
Healthy Aging

EAGLE COUNTY
Healthy Aging

Dear Community Members,

Welcome to the 2021 Eagle County Aging Well Plan. This plan is intended to give community members a snapshot of the age-friendly priorities and focus areas that Eagle County is committed to addressing over the next four years: physical environment, social isolation and inclusion, and healthcare. Our goal is to ensure active and healthy aging, economic and social vitality, and a thriving age-friendly community for people of all ages as they continue to live, work and play in Eagle County.

In 2013, Eagle County became a leader in focused and intentional work around quality of life for our older residents. In 2017, we launched our first Aging Well Plan and have since accomplished a large number of goals and objectives that were part of that initial plan. Over the last 3-4 years, we have made noticeable improvements in the lives of older adults in our communities such as access to high level specialty healthcare, the launch of a one stop resource hub, and earning the National Age Friendly Community designation through AARP and the World Health Organization. While much has changed for the better since 2017, we still have work to do to ensure our residents see Eagle County as a place to remain as they age.

We look forward to accomplishing the goals set out in this plan through strong partnerships with community members and organizations alike, and are excited to continue to make Eagle County a place where residents, through all stages of aging, will have access to the activities and services they need to live robust, purposeful lives. We hope you will join us as we continue this journey together.

In Health,

Carly Rietmann
Eagle County Healthy Aging Supervisor

Jeff Shroll
Eagle County Manager

Kathy Chandler-Henry
Chairwoman, Eagle County Board of County Commissioners

EAGLE COUNTY MISSION:

Creating a Better Eagle County for All

EAGLE COUNTY VISION:

Eagle County is made up of thriving communities for families and is home to a vibrant workforce, with personal health and wellness achievable for all. Our natural beauty is preserved through purposeful environmental stewardship. We are an international year-round resort destination with a diverse, resilient economy.

EAGLE COUNTY AGING WELL VISION:

Eagle County older adults age in place with the highest possible quality of life.

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ABOUT THIS PLAN

A CALL TO ACTION FOR THE WHOLE COMMUNITY

Since 2013, Eagle County Public Health, through its Healthy Aging department, has been addressing older adult needs and creating programs and improving systems for the over 60 year old population in nutrition, transportation, social activities and educational workshops. These programs assist residents in maintaining their health and independence. As a result of Eagle County's work and accomplishments, in 2017, Eagle County was designated as an Age Friendly Community, providing a framework of best practices for creating programs and services, while adapting places and spaces to be livable for residents of all ages. This framework, coupled with the initiatives of Eagle County's Aging Well Plan, encourages residents to stay healthy and active. It provides programming, tools and support to allow older people to remain safe and independent, and be recognized as a valuable part of the community, as they continue to live and work in Eagle County.

Aging affects all residents of Eagle County and this 2021 update of th Aging Well Plan is a call to action to residents, community leaders, healthcare professionals, policymakers and County departments to recognize that, as conditions around us change, we, as a community, have a responsibility and an opportunity to address these challenges in a thoughtful, organized and deliberate way. This will allow Eagle County, as a community, to make meaningful improvements in the identified areas of concern, especially in the largest growing segment of the population, and become more person-centered and welcoming to residents of all ages.

While addressing the priorities and programming associated with this plan, it is important to recognize the unique geography and rural nature of Eagle County. The more remote residents of the community are prone to social isolation and loneliness and a sense that their voices are not heard. The initiatives of this plan work to intentionally include residents of the towns, valleys, neighborhoods and unincorporated parts of the whole County to engage and empower residents throughout the region.

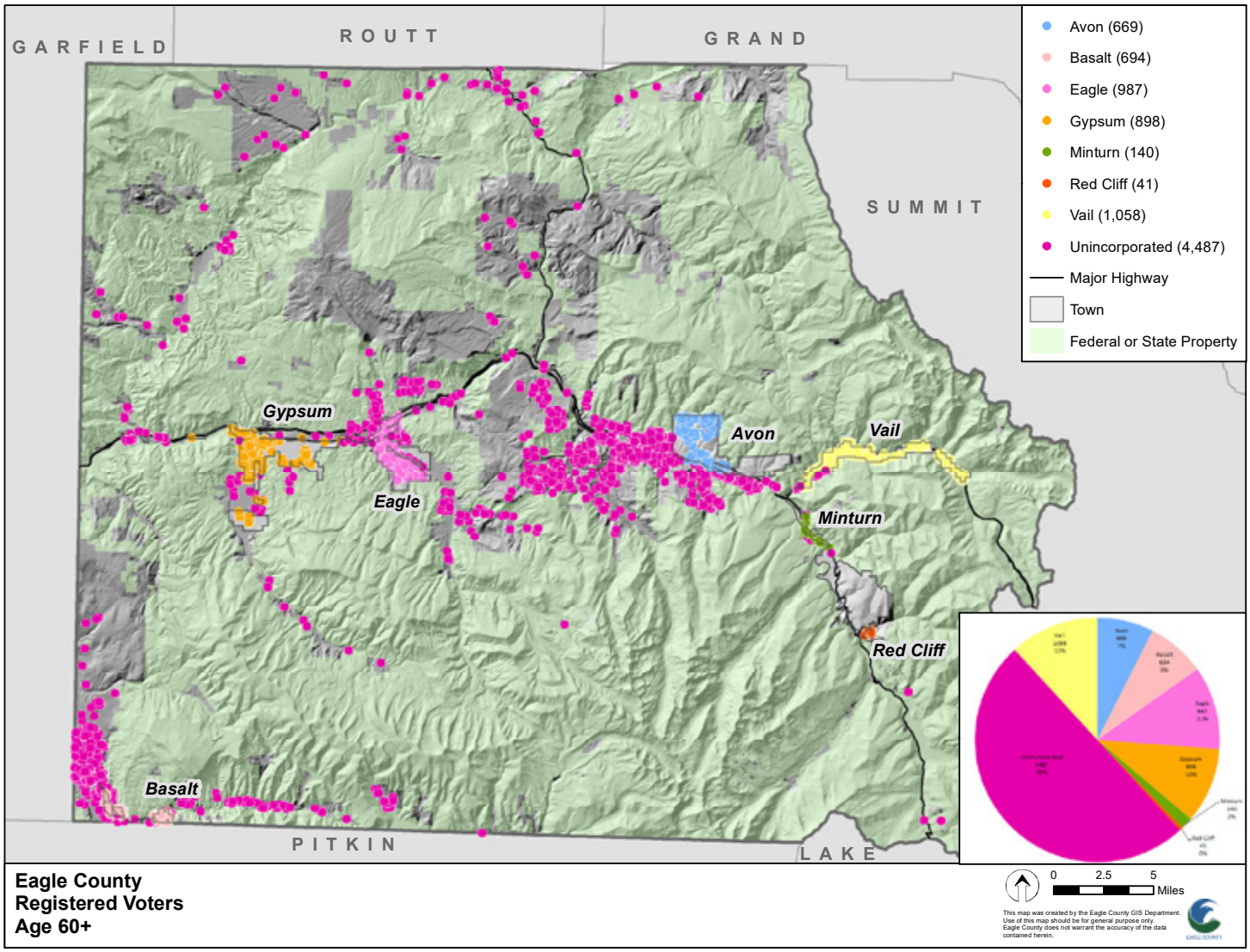
This plan also invites community members to change the narrative around aging and embrace the experience, wisdom and ongoing contributions, both economically and socially, of the diverse people that live in Eagle County, fostering a community of inclusion of all ages, means and abilities.

Eagle County is committed to every person, regardless of age, race, income, gender identity, culture, disability, veteran's status or religion, being able to age well within the community.

COMMUNITY PROFILE

Eagle County is home to a healthy, active population of 54,995 who, along with other rural Colorado counties, are challenged with housing, transportation and proximity of neighborhoods to the amenities needed for daily living. Almost one-fourth of the population (24%) is over the age of 55. The expansive geography of 1701 square miles, situated in the Eagle and Roaring Fork valleys, include the White River National Forest and Gore Range Mountains, providing scenic beauty and year-round outdoor activities. Community assets, including two world-class ski resorts, historic towns of Basalt and Minturn, Vail Health Hospital and the world renowned Steadman Clinic and Shaw Cancer centers, Colorado Mountain College, a regional airport, accessible and abundant arts and cultural activities, make it an attractive destination for the mountain lifestyle.

The population of Eagle County's older adults is expected to continue to grow, exponentially, through 2035 as the Baby Boomers age in community. Older adults enjoy living in Eagle County with 88% rating Eagle County as an excellent or good place to live but only 75% rating Eagle County as a good place to retire. The 2020 population of residents over 65 is 7199 and is expected to nearly double to 14,160 in 2035. Of these older adults, 2491 (35%) continue to be in the labor force and 1077 live alone. Eagle County continues to anticipate, examine and prepare for this growth in older adult population through the creation of policies, programs and services for residents of all ages.



Eagle County
Registered Voters
Age 60+

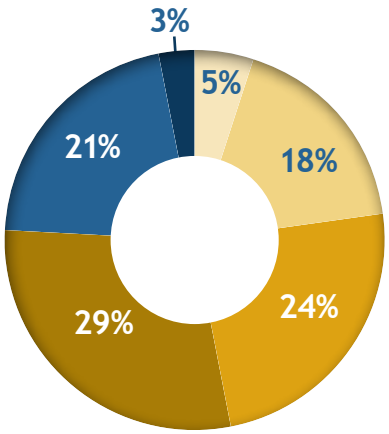
OLDER POPULATION IN EAGLE COUNTY AT A GLANCE

Population

Total Population (2020)

54,995

Population Groups (2020)



BY AGE:

- Preschool (0-4)
- School Age (5-19)
- Millennial (20-24)
- Adult (35-54)
- Baby Boomer (55-76)
- Older Adult (77+)

POPULATION 60+

17%

Older Adult Growth

	2020	2025	2030
Total Population	54,995	61,575	67,160
Age 60+	10,071	11,453	12,997
Age 75+	2,047	3,019	3,654
Age 85+	364	506	831

Physical

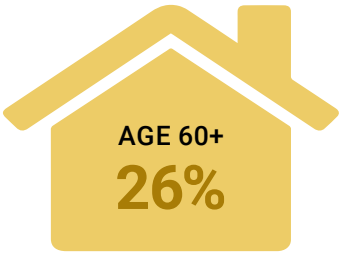
Living Alone

AGE 60+

1,077

Housing Challenges

Live in housing that does not fit their needs.

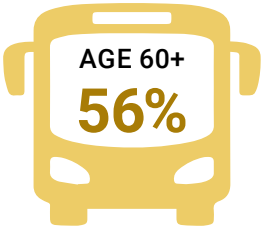


AGE 60+

26%

Transportation Challenges

Don't feel comfortable using public transportation.



AGE 60+

56%

Social

Social Connection (age 60+)

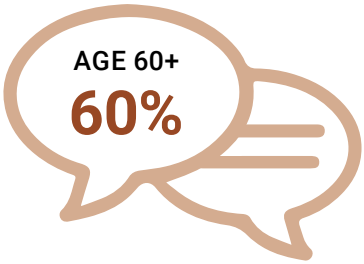
30% feel lonely or isolated

37% have issues with finding and getting to interesting events

30% report feeling depressed

Communication Challenges

Don't feel their voice is heard in the community.



Economic Contribution

AGE 60+

Paid:	$148,710,492
Unpaid:	$ 81,977,015

TOTAL

$230,687,507

to the economy in Eagle County

Health & Healthcare

Healthcare Needs

36%

have trouble finding healthcare they need.

Physical Health

30%

are able to find affordable physical healthcare.

Mental Health

26%

are able to find affordable mental health care.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Older adults in Eagle County have opportunities to live in safe, accessible, suitable housing that is close to transportation and have the resources they need to live comfortably and independently.

The environment in which older adults live has a profound impact on quality of life and the ability to age safely in community. Research of rural elders reveals that a majority (76%) of older adults prefer to remain in their homes while only half feel they will be able to do so. Thirty-six percent plan to make modifications to their home to make it more livable as they age. Aging in a familiar home, neighborhood, and/or community increases social inclusion by helping to maintain connection to neighbors and participation in familiar activities. Appropriately sized and equipped housing also prevents premature assisted living. Older adults in Eagle County, considered a rural, destination resort area, face housing and transportation challenges that are often worsened by demographics differences, dated infrastructure, economic conditions, and low density. Lack of downsizing or right-sizing options within Eagle County force many older residents to remain in more remote, unsafe and unfit dwellings or relocate to communities that better fit their needs.

In addition, the mature age of much of Eagle County housing stock contributes to affordability challenges of older adult homeowners attempting to pay for repairs, maintenance, efficiency and accessibility modifications. Several research reports reveal that older adults living alone also experience a greater incidence of falls and resulting consequences of hospitalization and restriction of activities. In Eagle County, over one thousand (1077) older adults are living alone while over half (55%) report living in 2 people homes. The likeliness of living alone increases sharply after age 65. Lack of universal design features such as no-step entries, single story living, and wide doors and hallways prevent older adults from living safely and comfortably and within their current home. Rural older adults have a higher homeownership rate, at 83%, but in Eagle County, 50% of these residents are still paying off their mortgages, leaving little funds for health and safety improvements.

Transportation is inextricably connected to housing and healthy living as geographic isolation increases risk of cognitive impairments, depression, chronic conditions, poor nutrition, and decreased physical activity. Transportation connects older adults to economic, social and civic opportunities. Ninety percent of older adults make their local trips via vehicles and older adults are “overrepresented” in both vehicle and pedestrian crash fatalities. Although Eagle County’s public transportation is safe, efficient and reliable, the “first mile/last mile” challenge is particularly daunting for older adults. Once walkable or bikeable, these connections, from public transportation hubs and stops, prevent older adults from venturing out often, if at all. As other rural communities, Eagle County also lacks robust private short-route or shared service transportation services including volunteers, taxis, Uber or Lyft. Driver safety is also an issue for older adults.

“

The financial support of the older adult programs makes a world of difference in my life, as well as a few hundred others in our community.

PROGRESS & CURRENT CONDITIONS

The 2017 Eagle County Aging Well Community Report concluded that older adults in Eagle County should have ample options for safe, suitable, and accessible independent housing. In an effort to initiate interest in developing these options, the Aging Well Plan identified and completed the following:

- Created a comprehensive inventory and interactive online Senior Housing Map of senior-friendly housing options throughout Eagle County
- Compiled a list of available independent senior housing
- Developed infographic resources on in-home assistive devices for common challenges faced by aging adults
- Gathered development plans in the region and advocated for senior-friendly housing

In 2018, 26% of Eagle County older adults reported not having housing that fit their needs while 27% had trouble maintaining their home and even more (34%) had challenges maintaining their yards. As housing options continue to be pushed further from hubs and services, only 44% find public transportation as a viable option while 17% are unable to find any safe or affordable transportation.

> Eagle County is a place where our older adults feel supported, loved, and thrive.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Participate in Eagle County's 2021 Comprehensive Plan process through the Housing, Transportation and Placemaking committees
- Organize a virtual Aging Well Speaker Series on age friendly home topics such as weatherization, universal design and accessibility, making a dwelling "Homefit for Older Adults," and purging and/or downsizing
- Connect older adults and families with purging and/or downsizing resources
- Promote Vintage's in-home services vouchers program for assistance with cleaning, organizing and discarding
- Continue to grow the volunteer driver program by partnering with outside volunteer recruitment organizations
  METRIC: Add at least 5 new drivers to the program per year (2021-2025)
- Partner with Eco Transit to help shape future paratransit policies & service for older adults in the Eagle River Valley
- Partner with the Roaring Fork Transit Authority (RFTA) to advocate for paratransit service in the mid-valley
- Participate in the Regional Transportation Coordinating Council (RTCC) to assist in the identification and solution of transportation gaps in the region
- Advocate for a permanent locations for older adult/Healthy Aging activities in the mid-valley/El Jebel and Minturn areas

DEFINITIONS OF SUCCESS

- The voice and perspective of older adults is represented throughout the 2021 Eagle County Comprehensive Plan
- Older adults will have the knowledge and resources to effectively modify their homes to accommodate their needs as they age
- Older adults will have the resources and assistance needed to pare down belongings and downsize their housing needs to continue living independently in Eagle County
- Older adults will have robust paratransit services available when needed in both the Eagle River and Roaring Fork valley areas of Eagle County

> "These programs help seniors to get out and socialize, exercise and keep up with what is happening in our community.

SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT & INCLUSION

Older adults in Eagle County will have access to resources, technology, neighborhood groups, transportation and social activities that encourage engagement and promote overall wellness, while maintaining independence, privacy and personal control. Older adults in Eagle County will be recognized as a valuable part of the community.

Loneliness and social isolation have become a public health issue affecting 1 in 3 US adults over the age of 45. Multiple research studies have linked social isolation and loneliness to higher risks of high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, a weakened immune system, anxiety, depression, cognitive decline, Alzheimer's disease, and even death. Lower income older adults are more at risk for these physical and mental conditions. A Brigham Young University study found that prolonged social isolation is as harmful to health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, and is more harmful than obesity. In addition, social isolation and loneliness have serious financial implications with Medicare spending an estimated additional $6.7 billion each year on socially isolated older adults. Being physically isolated is one of the top predictors of loneliness.

The dispersed geography of Eagle County makes it difficult to have one centrally-located facility, easily accessible to all residents. In response to this challenge, Eagle County Healthy Aging (ECHA) has older adult gathering places located in Eagle, Minturn and El Jebel. Each of these centers host physical, educational and nutrition programs throughout the year.

Weekly connection with friends and a social network decrease loneliness. Research suggests that remaining socially engaged improves the quality of life for older adults and equates to better health. ECHA creates weekly/daily opportunities for the older population to interact through exercise classes, interactive educational and cultural activities and lunch, several days per week. These diverse programs and activities attract older adults, who participate for a variety of reasons, with a primary or secondary benefit of an opportunity for social connections. Online courses, webinars and clubs reach Eagle County's residents who are unable to travel to their local center.

Meaningful activities such as volunteering and working can help older adults improve the quality of life through a sense of contribution to the community, satisfaction from an accomplished activity, and the chance to assist others within the community and "make a difference." Older adult experience, wisdom and skills are valuable assets to the community. Unfortunately, ageism, across all aspects of the community, creates a barrier to engagement by older adults in these endeavors.

"

The senior centers are vital for mental health due to the socializing and since we do volunteer work, it provides a purpose.

PROGRESS & CURRENT CONDITIONS

The 2017 Aging Well Plan, in collaboration with partners, created a centralized well-known resource hub with up-to-date information about programs and services available for older adults in Eagle County. Agingwelleaglecounty.us is a "one-stop-shop" providing online and in-person options for older residents to access pertinent information. This informational hub was promoted in the Vail Daily, via broadcast outlets and in the monthly Healthy Aging newsletters.

Despite these efforts, 63% of older adults in Eagle County report not knowing what services are available to them. Thirty percent of residents over 60 in Eagle County report feeling lonely and isolated, while 37% report being bored.

While program volunteers are sought regularly, 37% of older residents report having trouble finding meaningful volunteer assignments while 14% cannot find work. One fifth (20%) of the older population in Eagle County have experienced being treated unfairly or discriminated against because of their age. A large percentage (60%), of the older adults, do not feel their voice is heard within the community.

> The healthy meals twice a week are great. Socializing, playing cards, yoga, & strength training are so very helpful in keeping me active and engaged!

RECOMMENDATIONS

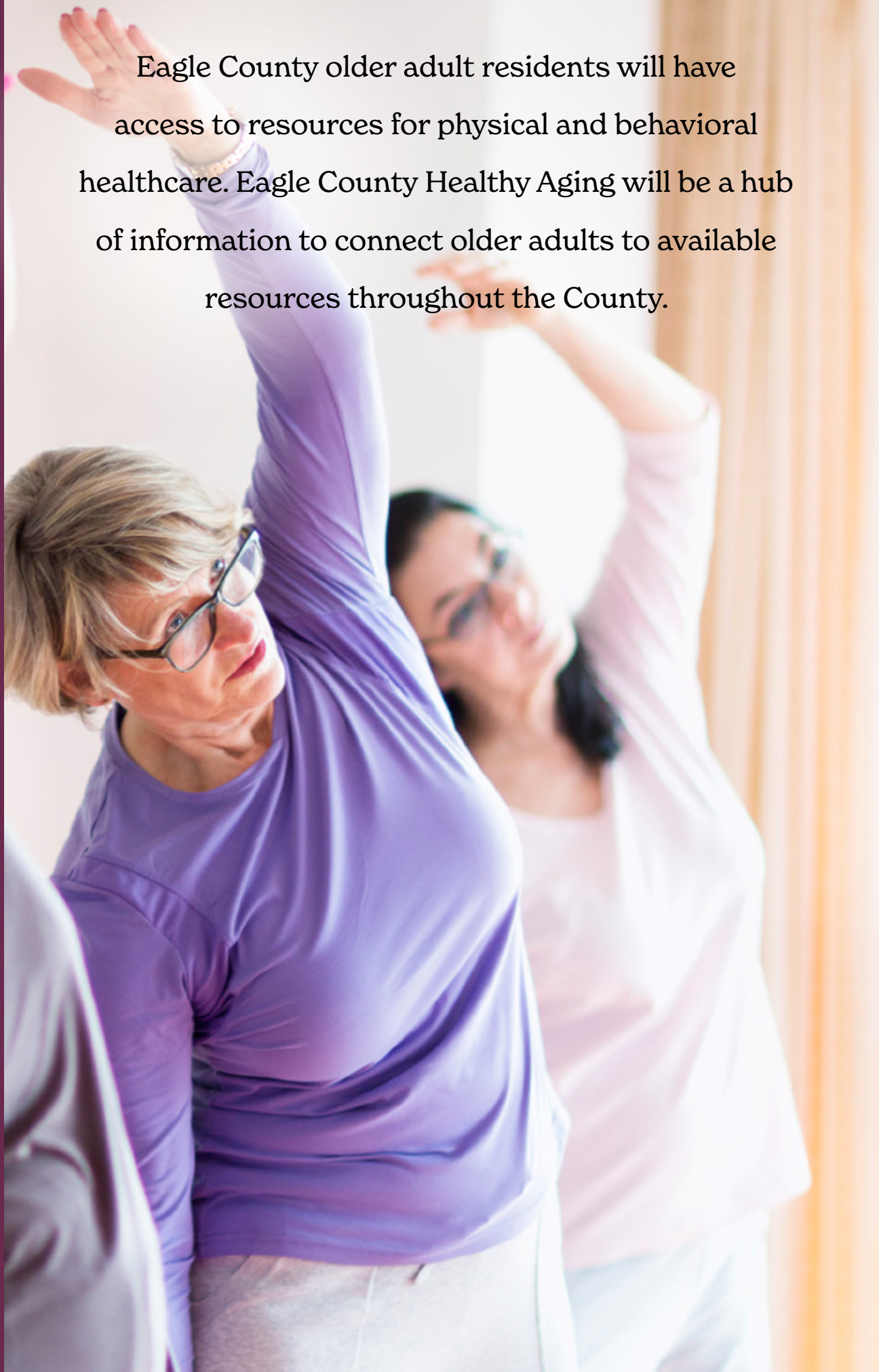
- Continue to hold regularly scheduled exercise classes, both in-person and virtual, at all three ECHA sites
- Provide safe spaces for small groups to congregate to facilitate social experiences at ECHA sites
- Continue to offer high quality Healthy Aging activities such as lunches, foot care, educational programs, activity groups, game groups, etc.
  METRIC: Hold at least 2-3 social activities at each ECHA site per month, expanding this number once virus risk decreases
- Conduct regular small group Changing the Narrative trainings to address ageism in the region
  METRIC: Hold at least 2 small group Changing the Narrative trainings per year
- Work with the Vail Valley Partnership to create an Age Friendly Employer designation and replicate with similar partners in the Roaring Fork Valley
  METRIC: At least 5 businesses will be designated as Age Friendly Employers by 2025
- Support neighbors-helping-neighbors programs through partners, religious organizations and other non-profits
- Provide ongoing reassurance calls from Healthy Aging staff and volunteers; Investigate the possibility of creating an older adult connector program
- Help older adults to acquire technology tools and assist with training; Identify needs and recruit student volunteers from local schools, to assist older adults with technology challenges
- Collaborate with Maria's Place and other partners to promote cognitive activities to help reduce boredom and boost brain power
- Continue to promote and foster intergenerational programming through partnering with local schools
- Continue to partner with the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) to recruit volunteers and foster additional service opportunities throughout the county

DEFINITIONS OF SUCCESS

- Older adults in Eagle County are aware of the various programs and services offered through ECHA and its partners
- Eagle County Healthy Aging is viewed as the trusted, up-to-date, knowledgeable source for information and resources for older adults and their families
- Older adults feel connected and supported in their neighborhood communities
- Local businesses are informed about the Age Friendly Employer program and encouraged to earn the designation
- Eagle County is a place where residents understand the damaging effects of ageism on the community and collaborate to prevent ageist attitudes and themes
- Older adults in Eagle County have robust opportunities for social and cognitive engagement without experiencing barriers to participation
- Residents of younger generations regularly interact and engage with older adults in their communities
- Older adults in Eagle County are valued and viewed as assets to their communities for their wisdom and life experience; older adults are consulted to help solve community issues as they arise

HEALTH & HEALTHCARE

Eagle County older adult residents will have access to resources for physical and behavioral healthcare. Eagle County Healthy Aging will be a hub of information to connect older adults to available resources throughout the County.



Healthcare and access to healthcare continue to be a challenge throughout rural Colorado, including Eagle County. Eagle County consistently ranks high as an overall healthy community coming in 3rd in Colorado for health outcomes and 8th in health factors. However, the ratios of primary care physicians (1304:1), dentists (1617:1) and mental health professionals (579:1) make it difficult for older adults to access they healthcare they want and need, especially those on Medicare and Medicaid. In many cases, diagnosis and treatment are obtained in different towns, some hours away. It is not unusual for older adults to move out of the community to access healthcare.

> A very beneficial program.
> This has made a difference in my life.
> Please keep it going.

> When my wife got very sick the people at senior lunch helped me in many ways including nutrition. They really cared and it was enlightening.

PROGRESS & CURRENT CONDITIONS

The 2017 Aging Well Plan targeted healthcare providers to increase accommodations for older adults in the areas and paperwork, length of appointments and language barriers. Unable to connect and partner with providers, this goal was redirected to assist older adults in being advocates for their own healthcare, by providing more information and tools to use during their healthcare visits. The resulting Red Binder Project engaged and empowered older adults by assisting them with keeping track of physician visits, understanding and remembering care plans, preparing for emergencies and making plans for future healthcare decisions. It also created a comprehensive form that older adults may use for their Personal Healthcare Record as well as a Health Literacy Information & Resource tool.

Finding needed healthcare is difficult for 36% of Eagle County's older adults with only 30% able to find affordable physical healthcare. Nearly one-fifth (18%) of the older residents are experiencing tooth or mouth problems and are unable to find dental care. While community older adult research reveals that 30% of Eagle's older adults feel depressed, only one quarter of elders (26%) are able to find affordable mental healthcare. Once prescribed medication for any healthcare condition, 32% have trouble affording to pay for it.

The 2020 pandemic created a urgent need to connect older adults to updated and accurate information about the outbreak itself, as well as access to services and programs to assist older adults in being "safer at home," while staying healthy, comfortable and engaged. The innovative and comprehensive Safer at Home guidelines created and executed by Eagle County Healthy Aging, to connect older adults to information and resources, have been recognized and replicated throughout the State of Colorado.

> "The Eagle County staff at this program are sensitive to senior needs and knowledgeable concerning available resources that help seniors stay independent.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Sustain regular communication between Healthy Aging and Eagle River and Roaring Fork Valleys' healthcare providers to advocate for older adult needs
- Promote mental and behavioral health resources for older adults in all areas of Eagle County
- Continue to promote dental and vision vouchers from Vintage and available, affordable dental programs for older adults
- Continue to share education and resources with providers about how best to serve older adults during office visits
- Empower older adults to take charge of their healthcare
- Continue to partner with Vail Health to focus on creating an Age Friendly Health System and addressing the 4 M's: Medication, Mentation, Mobility and What Matters
  METRIC: Hold monthly meetings with Vail Health and other community providers to ensure older adult needs are being intentionally addressed within our healthcare system
- Continue offering caregiver support through resources and meetings in both the Eagle River and Roaring Fork Valleys
- Continue partnership with the Alzheimer's Association for resources and education
- Continue to partner with Caregiver Connections (CC) and Aspen Compassion to support family caregivers; Promote CC's Activity Buddies and Caregiver Respite programs

DEFINITIONS OF SUCCESS

- Older adults are supported by a diverse offering of healthcare providers to ensure they are able to receive high quality care and address all conditions within Eagle County or its nearby region
- Eagle County fosters an environment where older adults are recognized as a valuable part of the community
- Healthcare leaders in Eagle County consider older adult patients when prioritizing care plans and making planning decisions
- Family caregivers in Eagle County feel supported, are aware of, and utilize all the resources available to them

SUMMARY

NEXT STEPS

This Aging Well Plan identifies three key areas where collaborative focus and action will lead to considerable advancements towards Eagle County residents' ability to age well within the County. The success of this Plan depends on the collective participation of the County government, local governments, businesses, nonprofits and the community members themselves. Empowering residents, including the older population, to join programs and activities that will encourage them to be healthy, active and engaged, will reduce the need for increased services, medical interventions and the possibility of older residents needing to relocate out of Eagle County.

The pandemic of 2020 has reminded us that no amount of planning can replace the importance of collective community efforts towards a mutually beneficial goal. Over the next 4 years, Eagle County Healthy Aging will work with our partners to provide carefully considered and prudent programs and services that benefit all members of the community, while focusing on the health and welfare of our older residents.

Residents of Eagle County, equipped with their wisdom and experience, are an integral part of the process. Their contributions, both economic and personal, shall be recognized and valued. At the end of each year, Eagle County Healthy Aging will compile an overview of the work and accomplishments of that year. To learn more about the details of the work or to get an update at any given time, please email us at healthyaging@eaglecounty.us or visit www.eaglecounty.us/publichealth/healthyaging.

RESOURCES & REFERENCE MATERIALS

Eagle County Aging Well Initiative & 2017 Eagle County Aging Well Plan.
https://www.eaglecounty.us/publichealth/healthyaging

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> These programs and services give me something to look forward to every week.

> The staff is kind and patient and provide many helpful updates and resources.

> I enjoy the social part of being involved and it has given me more independence. It is just plain fun and the help is great.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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